



Host Handout

Thank you for hosting a Community Character in a Box! The input from your community will help the CodeNEXT Team understand the characteristics that best represent what your neighborhood looks like and the places that are distinctive or unique. It will also help us understand what areas are viewed as strengths, as well as those that could be improved.

STEP 1: COMMUNITY MAPPING

In this step, your group will talk about what you like and what could be improved in your local area. Place multi-colored dots on the area map with an explanation why you consider these places assets (strengths), constraints (weaknesses), or opportunities for improvement.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: 45-60 MINUTES

- Provide all participants with the instruction handout.
- Lay out the two large posters – “Area Map” and “Learn About Your Neighborhood”.
- Have group get familiar with maps. Discuss places that people feel are assets (strengths), constraints (weaknesses) and opportunities for improvement – see handout for examples of types of places to locate on map.
- Have people place colored dots on maps to mark assets, constraints and opportunities for improvement. Be sure to have them explain in writing why they identified that location – ask them to be as specific as possible. Draw line to connect the colored dot to the corresponding comment. Write comments directly on the map.

ABOUT THE MAP POSTERS

The “Area Map” represents a Neighborhood Reporting Area designated by the City. It may be larger than your neighborhood boundaries and is not necessarily the same as the area covered by an existing Neighborhood Plan. The “Learn About Your Community” poster provides more details about existing infrastructure and current zoning, as well as a future land use map from the existing neighborhood plan (if applicable).

ABOUT THE PROCESS

If your group is large (over 10 people), split into groups of 5-8 people and have each group do the process above. Spend the last 10 or 15 minutes comparing maps and comments.

STEP 2: PHOTO DOCUMENTATION

In this step, your group will explore your community on foot, taking photos of the buildings, streets, sidewalks, and public spaces that capture the character of your community.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: 1.5-2 HOURS

- Organize into small teams (ideally 2-4 people). Take a group photo of all the participants before starting.
- Using the street map decide which team will cover which part of the neighborhood. If time is limited or group is small, focus on the section of the neighborhood you are most familiar with and work outward.
- Make sure each team has a street map of the area, the instruction handout describing what to photograph and a camera (mobile phone cameras work fine).
- Teams go out on foot or by bike to take photographs. It's okay to drive to an area, but you should take photos while walking around, not from a moving car.
- Take photos that best represent what your neighborhood looks like and places that are distinctive or unique. Include examples of residential and commercial buildings, sidewalks, streets, special places, etc. (see handout for details). Avoid taking duplicate photos. Each participant should try to shoot 15-20 photos.
- Each photograph should be 1 meg file size or larger, preferably in a JPG format. Photos should be sent directly to the email address on the handout. Please do not label them. This will inhibit our ability to use them in posters.
- Photo documentation is meant to represent what character your neighborhood currently embodies, and to identify distinctive or unique qualities. They are not being judged as good or bad; this photo documentation serves a different purpose than the mapping exercise.

MATERIALS IN THE BOX:

- 5 Pens (fine tip sharpies)
- Red, green and blue dots
- 1 “Area Map” poster
- 1 “Learn About Your Neighborhood” poster
- Participant instruction handouts
- Host instruction sheet
- Street map of area
- Participant contact list

STEP 3: TURN IN YOUR COMMUNITY CHARACTER IN A BOX

Please return the completed Box materials within 5 days of completing the process.

- Return these items to the City of Austin:
 - Two posters - “Area Map” and “Learn About Your Community” – with the group’s comments
 - Box and extra materials not used – pens, sticky dots, extra handouts
 - Any street maps of area indicating the routes that were walked to take photos (optional)

TIPS FOR GATHERING A GROUP

Invite your neighbors to participate in this Community Character in a Box activity. The event can be held in someone’s home, a local coffee shop, library, church, community center or other convenient location. Ideally, it’s a place that’s centrally located, easy to access for all, and will serve as a good jumping off point for taking pictures of your neighborhood.

You’ll want to make sure you have enough room to display the large maps and that everyone can hear each other well. The mapping exercise works well on a table with enough chairs for everyone, but you can also hang the maps on a wall if space is tight.

Tell people to dress comfortably if they’re going to be walking and taking photos. Encourage everyone to bring a camera or mobile phone with a camera. If their camera or phone has “location services”, have them turn that setting ON so the location of the photos can be determined when they are submitted.

TIPS FOR HELPING THE PROCESS GO WELL

As the host, you can help the group have a good experience by helping everyone feel welcome, getting agreement on a few simple discussion guidelines, and making sure everyone gets a chance to participate. It’s helpful to be familiar with the area you are documenting but you don’t need to have any special knowledge about the area or the land development code. Your role is to explain how to conduct the process, help everyone participate, keep the group on task and on time, and make sure people’s input is written on the map. You’re also the person who will make sure the completed Box materials and photos are returned to the City.

Do a round of introductions at the beginning of the meeting. You might ask people to briefly share why they came to the meeting and one thing about their community that is important to them. Be sure to have them keep it brief!

Explain your role to the group. Ask everyone to agree on the following set of discussion guidelines. As host, you can refer to these if someone dominates the conversation or things get off track.

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

- Respect differences and consider the value of all ideas
- Take time to listen, reflect and ask questions
- Be concise and make sure everyone gets a chance to talk
- Speak one at a time
- Be specific and help others understand your views

Let the group know that it is okay to have different views and to disagree. Different people may mark the same area as an asset, constraint or opportunity. The group does not need to come to consensus. But it is important to be respectful and make sure everyone feels comfortable to speak freely of concerns and ideas about the community.

HERE’S HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE USED

The CodeNEXT Team will use your photo documentation and comments from the mapping exercise to:

- Compare types of buildings and spaces across the city to understand similarities and differences.
- Understand the distinctive qualities of your community.
- Create a citywide Community Character Manual to visually tell a story of each area
- Bring more information to future planning efforts.

Remember that all comments and photos received from each completed “Box” will be available online for the public to view.

CITY OF AUSTIN CONTACT:

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512-974-5658



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City of Austin Planning and Development Review.
One Texas Center, 505 Barton Springs Road, Austin TX 78704

PARTICIPANTS

Email

[illegible]

Neighborhood Reporting Area _____

Host name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Meeting date & location _____

Ask participants to email their photos directly to the City at the email address provided on the instruction sheet.

Paulina Urbanowicz
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**ADDITIONAL SUBMISSIONS OF
INFORMATION WILL BE ACCEPTED
THROUGH THE END OF 2014.**

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